

Speed cameras to debut in Rockville and Gaithersburg

■ Procurement delays slowed rollout of the program, police say

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Montgomery County's speed cameras are expected to begin nabbing violators in December, but motorists caught over the speed limit in the first month will be issued warnings instead of tickets.

Police had expected to have the speed cameras operating in October, but procurement delays now have them looking at December to begin using them, said Lt. Ronald G. Smith of the Montgomery County Police Special Operations Division.

The county is working in partnership with Rockville, Gaithersburg and the Village of Chevy Chase to roll out the cameras at "roughly the same time," said County Councilman Philip M. Andrews, chairman of the Public Safety Committee.

"Pedestrian safety is very important, and we lose a dozen to 15 people a year to pedestrian fatalities," said Andrews, (D-Dist. 3) of Gaithersburg. "Speed cameras can be an important tool to improve safety."

The county will begin with six mobile speed cameras, then add six fixed cameras over time, Smith said. Initial sites for the cameras have not been selected. Police are reviewing a "matrix of data, crash reports, speed complaints," he said.

About 300 streets fit the criteria that the speed cameras be placed only in school zones and residential areas with a 35 mph speed limit, Smith said.

However, some streets have more trouble with speeders than others, Smith said. Police have set up monitoring pads on several streets to find out how many people speed when police are not present. The speed pads also will give a baseline

ABOUT SPEED CAMERAS

- Speed cameras are restricted to school zones and residential areas with a 35 mph speed limit.
- The cameras are activated by radar and take photos of a vehicle's license plate along with the time and location of the offense, similar to the red-light cameras already in operation. The owner is tracked by the license plate and mailed a ticket with a \$40 fine and no points.
- Police will give drivers some leeway — 10 mph over the speed limit — before issuing a citation.

number to see if the cameras do reduce speeding.

The six fixed cameras would be used where speeding is worst or where there is not enough room for one of the parked mobile cameras, which are fitted onto small trailers, Smith said. "Ultimately, the goal here is to reduce speeding in residential areas and school zones," he said.

Speed cameras became law in January after the General Assembly overrode Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr.'s veto. Montgomery County will serve as a pilot program for the state and must report by the end of 2009 on how effective the program is at stopping speeders.

If motorists slow down because of the cameras, it could eliminate the need for speed bumps, Andrews said.

"Speed cameras are a better alternative to addressing speeding than speed humps," he said. "People like what speed humps do, but they're definitely an imperfect solution. They slow down emergency vehicles and some of them were put in poorly so they slow down people to slower than the speed limit."